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BLM slates meeting to hear from boaters using Ruby-Horsethief

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – Before beginning the second year of its camping permit system for the popular Ruby-Horsethief Canyon section of the Colorado River, the Bureau of Land Management wants to hear how people feel the first year went.

BLM is hosting a public meeting Tuesday, Jan. 15, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Two Rivers Convention Center in Grand Junction. Staff from the BLM's McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area will share data collected during 2012, provide updates on how they felt the system worked, and ask how boaters felt it worked.

“We want to take what we learn each year and improve how the system runs,” said Katie Stevens, manager of the McInnis Canyons NCA. “Hearing from the people who are using the area is a key part of this evaluation.”

Last year BLM began a new camping permit system for the 35 camping spots available along the Ruby-Horsethief stretch of the Colorado River to better manage the increasing use of this popular area between Loma, Colo. and Westwater, Utah.

“We worked closely with private boaters and outfitters over several years to develop this permit system – and to identify and improve additional campsites,” Stevens said.

Under the permit system, boaters wishing to camp in this area between May 1 and Sept. 30 are required to obtain a permit in advance. In 2012 permits for Friday and Saturday nights were issued by the Grand Junction Field Office by phone or in-person, with permits available on a first-come, first-served basis beginning the Monday 60 days before the weekend of use. Camping permits for the nights with less demand – Sunday through Thursday – were available at the launch site.

“We made the mid-week permits available on-site thinking it would be more convenient for campers, but our initial impression is that it makes more sense to issue them consistently with the weekend permits,” Stevens said. “We’re also looking at extending the hours a person can pick-up permits and making them available electronically. Before we make any adjustments, we need to hear from the boaters using this area.”

BLM did not charge a fee for the permits the first year to focus on the permitting system itself. In 2013 BLM will charge a fee for the camping permits based on group size. Fees would depend on the size of group and campsite selected: a small group (1-5 people) will pay \$20, a medium group (6-14 people) will pay \$50, and a large group (15-25 people) will pay \$100. Fees collected will be used on-site to help manage and improve the area, including maintaining campsites and ensuring rangers are on-site to assist the public and enforce rules and regulations.

“The fee structure has been approved and will be in place in 2013 for camping permits, but we can discuss its implementation and specifics at the meeting as well,” Stevens said.

Specific details about the permit system are available by visiting:

<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/mcnca/recreation/Boating.html>.

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